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ONE DOLLAR

*Four*  
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*Quarters*







# Four Quarters

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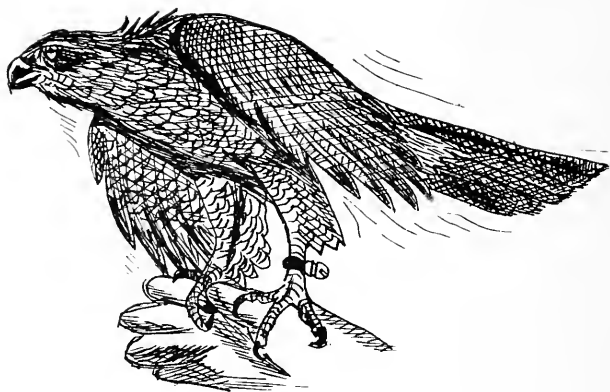
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Cover: Etching by A. Okamoto, 1973. Courtesy La Salle College Art Gallery.

Illustration on p. 2: "Goshawk," by Harold Whipple, La Salle Print Workshop.

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## Catbird Seat

*I sometimes think my favorite date in the history of art is May 29, 1913—the day of the Paris premiere of Stravinsky's "Rite of Spring" and the riots that ensued. I believe that shock value is a valid part of art, and I think we have lost something when—as seems to be true today—we no longer come to blows (even metaphorically) over the merits of artistic experimentation. (Perhaps the great innovators of the first twenty years of this century overdid controversy as an artistic principle, and we are still too shell-shocked to react).*

Certainly recent attempts to publicize literary feuds—the Wilson - Nabokov arguments, for example—have conspicuously failed. And the same is true for another would-be controversy: John Gardner's attack on modern writers for failing to provide us with "moral fiction." Although Gardner's strictures have been written up in *The New York Times Magazine* and have been discussed in columns and articles in places such as this, they have not become much of a topic for public discussion.

Frankly I'm surprised. Not only is Gardner a well-known writer; his conservative (almost reactionary), anti-experimental bias seems to me to have strong (if only implicit) grounding in American literary history, and in the tastes of contemporary readers and writers. That he has not become a folk hero testifies mightily to our resistance to controversy (or our pseudo-blasé or shell-shocked condition).

*(continued on page 34)*

# Stall Warning

MARY CLEARMAN

**“TAKE HER UP** to six thousand feet,” I tell her, and she gives me that tight look as if I’d told her to crash while I’m for chrissake sitting in the right seat of the plane alongside of her. But after swallowing she says,

“Full throttle?”

“You want to climb, don’t you?” I says.

And blushing because she now remembers what I told her last week, she shoves in the throttle and hauls back on the wheel, too goddamn heavy-handed of course but they all are at first, and the Chickenhawk roars upstairs while the layers of blue fall off behind us. At this altitude in the Chickenhawk, which is my name for the Cessna 172 because it’s so slow though it’s a good plane don’t get me wrong and a forgiving plane but a slow bitch, you lose all sense of speed so it seems like you’re hanging up here out of the reach of gravity and oh shit it’s pretty. Hell I guess I thought after last week it’d look different up here which shows what your mind can do to you.

She lets the altimeter reach six thousand feet before she tries to level off, so naturally we’re at sixty-five hundred before she notices it, and when she does she overcorrects by shoving the nose down.

“Jesuschrist!” I yell at her, “You can’t manhandle a plane like that! You got to relax! Let up! Look what you’re doing! Shit, you just lost another two hundred feet. Remember what I told you last week? Keep your eyes outside the plane and not on the instrument panel, because you’re not an instrument pilot and you can’t read them instruments yet. You just watch that strip of horizon over the cowling. Remember what I told you? As long as that strip of horizon stays constant your altitude stays constant. Fifty feet variance in altitude each way is all they allow you on the check ride.”

She’s flustered now and red in the face but she’s figured out how to level out at five thousand feet and hold it. “That’s better,” I tell her, and it is better. Shit, she’s no worse than any other student pilot. And she gives a little sigh, all grateful because I’ve let up on her for the moment and because she’s got no idea what’s in store for her next.

"Okay. You remember how I told you to trim for slow flight?"

No, she doesn't. She's embarrassed, and she starts to explain something over the roar of the engine but thinks better of it because she can't talk and fly at the same time.

"Remember? If you want slow flight you bring the nose up. If you want speed you push the nose down. If you want to climb, you add throttle."

She nods.

"Shit, you got to more than remember!" All of a sudden my hands are shaking like I was afraid was going to happen. "You got to know it so good—you got to practice it till it seems like the natural thing to do, which it ain't. The natural thing to do when you lose altitude is pull the nose up, which you can't never do, because it'll kill you." *And I didn't mean to say that but Terry you son of a bitch I hope you're listening* "Speed means nose down, and slow flight means nose up, and throttle is to climb, and you got to make that be natural for you. Okay. You remember how to trim? Trim for forty miles an hour."

I lean back against the door with my hands in my pockets while she scowls and talks to herself and finally works out what it is she has to do, which is bring the nose up gradual and ease back on the throttle until we're hanging up there over the practice area on our backs with the tail underneath us and the cowlings blotting out everything but blue sky and the sun on the windshield. After her arm starts to ache from holding the nose up, she remembers the trim and spins it back, overcorrecting at first and then getting it just right. Hell, she ain't going to be too bad. If she keeps flying.

I come out of my dumps long enough to laugh at her. "No reason why you have to choke that wheel to death."

She stares at her hand like she's never seen it before. Her knuckles are white and wet from the death grip she's got on the wheel until, forcing a smile when I laugh at her again, she pries her fingers loose and flexes them.

"You're doing all right. What you got to get over is fighting the airplane. That's half your trouble right now. Ease up! You're all the time trying too hard. Hell the plane, it'll damn near fly itself if you give it a chance. See there? You're maintaining altitude just fine now you ain't thinking about it."

She looks at the altimeter and immediately she drops fifty feet and overcorrects. I wait until she's back at six thousand feet and steady. This time her smile isn't forced. She's getting the idea.

"It's harder for a woman. Anything mechanical is," I say to cheer her up, but all I get for it is a dirty look. Hell, I won't argue about it, but I've taught a lot of women to fly and the only difference between them and her is I knew why they wanted to learn but I got

no idea what she's after. A woman student pilot is usually some private pilot's wife who's been flying around the country with him and has figured out what would happen if she was along with him the day he had a fatal heart attack at maybe twelve thousand feet. This girl I don't know. She's not married and I know she had to borrow the money for the lessons. But she goes at it like her life depended on it.

"Okay, put your carb heat on."

**S** HE DOES IT without asking why, so I break the news. "We're gonna practice some stalls now, and the first thing you always want to do before you do stalls is put on the carb heat and make sure there's no ice in the carburetor."

She's looking at me now and not at what she's doing, and she's all white around the mouth, but the worst thing that's going to happen to her is she may get airsick and have to puke in front of me. But hell, she's a big girl.

"Did you read about stalls like I told you to?"

She nods.

"Okay, what causes a stall?"

"Slow speed?" she yells over the roar.

"That's part of it, but remember what I told you about lift?"

She nods with her eyes on me, all wide and glassy like she might change her mind about what she read if I shake my head.

"It's the lift under the wings that keeps you flying. The steeper your angle of attack, the less lift you got to keep you flying. You get past a certain angle and she quits flying on you."

She's dry-mouthed now and ready to quit herself, except there's no way she can get out at six thousand feet, and she don't know which is worse, looking at me or looking at the airspeed indicator.

"It's all gravity in the long run, honey, it's all gravity. And we practice stalls now so if you ever stall by accident, your body'll do the right thing, because your mind won't stand a chance. I know you don't like it, but it's not dangerous as long as you keep your mind on flying, so quit looking so sick. You think I'd be up here if I thought we were gonna crash? Okay. I want you to keep coming back with that wheel. Bring that nose farther and farther back until the first stall warning comes on and then you'll feel the plane give a little lurch under you. That's how you know she's stalled. Then you push the nose down to recover and at the same time you give her full throttle. You got that? You push *down* even though your instinct's gonna tell you to pull up, and then you come in with full throttle. Okay?"

She ain't liking it at all, but mouth tight she starts to drag back on the wheel, and right away I see she's got the problem a lot of

woman pilots have and that's not enough left-arm muscle. She's got her right hand on the throttle where it belongs and with her left hand she's hauling back on the wheel, getting red-faced now and squirming around in her seat to try and get some leverage. We're on our backs again and nothing in front of us but cowling and clouds, and at last the stall warning starts to howl. You can't hear nothing but the stall warning once it starts, and she panics and drops the nose. The stall warning quits and I yell, "Come on! Pull! Stall her out!"

She pulls like hell and the stall warning starts in to screeching again, rackety goddamn thing and *it must have been the last thing Terry ever heard* and fuck I got to keep my mind off that. "Pull!"

She's grinding her teeth now and pulling with her eyes popped out of her face, but she's not a very big girl to start with and she just ain't got the muscle. Finally I take hold of the control on my side and lean back until the Chickenhawk gives a little flutter like she's been shot dead in the air. "You feel that?"

The goddamn stall warning is screeching like a banshee all the time, but I'll be go to hell but she pushes the nose down and adds throttle without looking at me to see if she's doing the right thing. The next minute the windshield is full of pasture and summer-fallow coming at us at two hundred miles an hour. Then it's clouds again and a steady horizon and damned if she ain't leveled the old Chickenhawk out without losing more than a couple hundred feet of altitude. Now that everything is under control from her point of view she does look at me, white in the face and wet and limp, and I tell her, "Okay, do it again."

She whimpers but she starts pulling back, and I wonder all over again why she's so set on learning to fly. It ain't just since she's had a lesson, either. I could tell it the day I talked to her on the telephone the first time. And shit I guess it's a good thing I went ahead and gave her a lesson last week because I sure the hell wouldn't have the heart to start a new pupil this week. Oh eventually, I know, give me a week or two and it'll be like nothing ever happened, but I wouldn't have minded putting her off today. Because she's new, that's the only reason. I should have had one of the guys with me this first time because the guys mostly know what happened and knew him and feel the same way I do and I guess that's what makes the difference and *oh shit Terry of all the stupid goddamn fucking things you could have done* and here I am letting my mind run on it again while she's actually gritted her teeth and damn near pulled the Chickenhawk back into a stall all by herself. At the last minute I give her a little help and the Chickenhawk lurches, we're over the top and falling fields rushing at us again and she's pushing the nose down and adding full throttle. Not quite such a smooth recovery this time.



Funny how often the first try is the best try for a long time. I got to keep my mind on my work, that's for sure. "Okay, do it again."

She sighs and I take a look at her because she's had a workout, all right. I remember what it feels like. Your blood turns to water you're so scared and the spit rises out of your mouth just before you get sick except you can't get sick, your guts are still a thousand feet above you, and it's happening too fast anyway, all over in less time than it takes to tell about it. What you realize only later is, there was nothing to be scared about. Just an exercise the instructor was making you practice. Only once or twice since I first soloed I've felt the same way, and once was flying through that electrical storm a year ago. No reason to be scared most of the time. It's the safest way to go as long as you don't make a mistake, but I know what it feels like in that split second you got to feel anything in and *I got to quit thinking about it*

"Listen," I tell her to distract myself, "Don't look so goddamn scared. Don't you know a stall's nothing to be scared of? Do you think I'd tell you to crash? Listen now—hey, does it bother you when I yell at you?"

"Yes," she says. "No," she adds quickly.

"I yell so's to get through to you. I know you're trying to think about everything at once, but you also got to act in a hurry and when I yell it eventually gets through. Hell, I yell at the men, too." *Terry told me after the first couple lessons he was ready to punch me out for it* "Because it's the only way you're gonna learn, right? Now look. These stalls ain't dangerous. It's not knowing what to do that's dangerous. Because there's nothing dangerous about flying unless you make a mistake. Try it again."

She leans back on the wheel like a good girl, but she's too tired.

"Come on, show some muscle," I urge, but she can't, so I go on talking to give her a chance to rest. "No, these stalls ain't dangerous. We come way up here to practice so you got plenty of airspace to recover in. It's a low altitude stall you got to watch."

She gives me a quick look, picking up on something, I don't know what. Ohshit. "All pilots practice stalls. It's the first thing you do in a new plane. You take her up to altitude and check out where she stalls. Look here." I draw back on the right seat control, treading on the left rudder at the same time to keep us steady against the torque of the propellor, which is another thing she's having trouble doing, and bring us way back with the nose lifting all the time into the clear blue and the cirrus streaks twenty thousand feet above us until at last she lurches and falters and I push the nose down and recover. Three stalls in less than a minute. "See, there's nothing to it. No big deal as long as you don't make a mistake."

"That's what I'm scared of," she yells over the engine noise.

"What? Making a mistake?"

SHE NODS, then shoots me that quick embarrassed look of hers. "That pilot—the one that was killed last week," she shouts. "The guys were talking about him. They said he just made a dumb mistake."

All I can say is, "It was dumb, all right."

"You knew him, then?"

"I taught him to fly."

She looks stricken. I hear my own voice hurrying to make it all right: "Which is why you practice these goddamn stalls, so you won't forget and do like he done, which was to come in over that

She looks stricken. I hear my own voice hurrying to make it all right: "Which is why you practice these goddamn stalls, so you won't forget and do like he done, which was to come in over that goddamn knoll alongside the Turner airstrip like he had a hundred times only this time he forgot to watch his airspeed." *And he was as good a student pilot as I ever had, he was as good a pilot as I am, so what do you think you're doing up here telling some poor little bitch she's safe so long as she don't make a mistake? Let somebody that still thinks he knows what he's talking about give flying lessons*

The sun is burning through the windshield and I'm breaking into a sweat, but at six thousand feet there ain't no way out but straight down. *Give me time* I tell myself like I've been telling myself all week. *Give me time and I'll be the same as I ever was*

To keep from listening to any more of my own lies, I'm about to tell her to head for the airport and land this crate when without any warning something like a bucket of goddamn bricks gets dropped on my stomach and I can't breathe and *Jesus I got to get out of here* except there ain't nothing between me and all of screaming space but a piece of glass and a strip of cowlings and a two-inch-wide safety belt that this minute is stretching like a piece of chewing gum as the cockpit spins.

The plane ain't in a spin. Part of me knows she's flying along level and not even knowing anything's wrong with me while the rest of me is still trying to get my breath back. It's the other part of me that finally pulls me out of it.

Some way I work up the spit to use my voice. "Okay," I hear me croak, "try one more stall and then we'll head in. Your hour'll be up by the time we get on the ground." And she leans back, really relaxed now and feeling good because the lesson's just about over and because she don't know this one more stall is for me and not for her.

Jesus I ain't never been through nothing like that. Flying through that lightning storm was nothing.

She glances over and I wonder if she sees two of me. No she don't. Now that she's decided there ain't nothing to be scared of, she's bringing the nose back just as steady as an old hand. She don't even wince when the stall warning comes howling on, and she gives it the last ounce all by herself, drawing the nose back until the Chickenhawk flutters and stalls. It's me that's sweating and fighting with myself not to reach out and push the nose down with the right-hand control and add power and head for the airport, God anything to get on the ground in a hurry. Except if I ever did that I know I'd never go up again.

Shit, she's doing it. She's pushing the nose down, adding power and leveling out as the fields advance and recede below us, and she's turning to me, face glowing because she knows she did it right.

"You think you can find the airport from here?" I croak.

I must sound all right because she looks around and points east. She's kept her directions straight.

"Okay, let's take her in."

She banks and heads east like she'd been flying a year instead of a week, and I lean back and think about sitting still. I'm okay. I'm okay. What a hell of a thing to happen, is all. But I'm better now. I can act normal.

"I been meaning to ask you," I yell, "how come you want to learn to fly?"

She looks at me blank, like why does there have to be a reason for it? Or maybe what's wrong with him? But I must be doing a good job of acting normal, because her eyes clear up and she yells back, "I guess I thought if I learned to fly, I could do anything."

I never thought of that as a reason, but thinking about it helps get my mind back on the track. Sure, all that's the matter with me is my mind jumped the tracks. I sure the hell hope I ain't been off the track all along and didn't just get a minute's glimpse of the way it really is. But I'm okay, I'm okay, and in five minutes we'll be on the ground. Don't want to think about the ground. Think about her. So what's she doing, thinking she can learn to fly and learn to do anything? Maybe she's as bad as I am and has to do one more stall to keep from losing all of it.

"So how do you like it now?" I yell.

Damned if her eyes don't light up in spite of the stalls and she yells back, "Great! It's like—" she's thinking it over—"like it's my life I'm on top of!" Yes, and she's flying all easy and relaxed now, not a care in the world, which she'll have to unlearn *can't never get cocky, I told him once Don't remember why because he never was*

"Just remember! You got to keep your mind on what you're doing. These airplanes are built safe, the new ones anyway. They got double electrical systems and 100-hour overhauls and the works

and hell, like I say, the plane will almost fly itself if you let it, but you always got to have your mind on it. You can't never get cocky."

She looks at me, only half hearing what I'm saying, because the sun is too bright up here and the sky too blue for anything to happen. And my hands start to shake again.

"You just told me not to be scared," she argues.

"That's right, except there's a time to be scared and that's when it feels too safe. When you get to sitting up here feeling fine and feeling like that ground down there ain't real, that's when you need to be scared, because you ain't never out of the reach of gravity, honey."

She sighs, not following it all. "It's the not making a mistake that worries me," she says. "I mean, to err is human, you know?"

**Y**EAH, I KNOW. But at least I can stop talking if I can't stop thinking, because we've got the airport in sight and she can't listen to me and think about her pre-landing check at the same time.

"Well?" I bark when she does nothing, and she gives me a funny look. I can tell she's forgotten what to do, so I start calling out the checklist.

"Carb heat. You don't still have it on, do you? No, you don't. Good. Trim. Tab. Throttle. Radio. Call the unicom on your base leg even though they probably won't answer after all the fussing they did to get that unicom center. Trim for eighty, that's your approach speed. You've got time now to look for other aircraft. They're supposed to call in just like you do, but sometimes they forget and you're just as dead when it's their fault. That's right, check your altimeter as you turn downwind. Don't let it get below 3000 yet. Do you remember how high we are above sea level?"

No, of course she don't. She's holding the mike and trying to remember our call letters and adjust the trim tab at the same time and remember what altitude she's supposed to be when she turns for final.

"Okay, you got another chance just before you turn final to check for other aircraft, and look there! There comes Louie in his spray plane. That son of a bitch has a full set of radios in that outfit, but you think he can be bothered to use them? No he just comes barreling in like he was the only plane in the sky. That's right, you let him go ahead and land. You're fine, but that's why you've always got to watch out. Okay now. Turn final. Turn *turn* now goddamn it! Keep your corner nice and square *square* not rounded off like that. See, now you got to jockey around to get your approach straight. You can't come in for a landing all screwed around sideways. Straighten her out! Okay, that's better *watch your altitude* you'll never make the runway if you don't give her a little power power

power goddamn it!"

*Terry coming in for a landing and that goddamn little knoll just east of the approach at the Turner airstrip and they said afterward he'd tried to get out of his seatbelt oh fuck he just came in too slow was all forgot about his airspeed forgot about that knoll wasn't thinking about what he was doing it only takes once To make mistakes is human, all right*

"Goddamn it, watch your airspeed! Jesuschrist you're close to stall speed. Listen, you want to stall at this altitude? That's what you've got to be scared of. You can't let your speed drop at this altitude. Okay, give her power. Okay, now you see you got the runway made, and you can cut back and—okay, now, just let the airspeed bleed off. Let her settle down gradual. No, no, hold her off *no*, don't jerk her up like that, you'll stall her out! That's better. Let her settle. Okay, start your flare but keep holding the nose off. That's right. Let all that airspeed bleed away. Hold the nose off. Pull, damn it! Pull! *Hold the nose off!*"

Hell, she just ain't strong enough. She's pulling for all she's worth.

"Hold the nose off," I bellow, and bump, bump, the tail comes down, and we bounce fifty feet and settle down again, and this time she manages to hold the nose off and we're on the runway, slowing down. I take over, stepping on the disc brakes to slow us down before we get to the last turnoff because I don't want to end up on the far end of the runway and have to taxi all the way back again.

And I glance over at her now. She's looking a little sick, but hell, she didn't do too bad for her second time in the air. You have to remember it's only her second time.

"Hell, you landed her," I tell her as I lean on the right rudder and turn off on the access pavement.

She brightens right up. "I guess I'm going to learn to fly after all!"

"Sure you are. You just got to learn to keep control of the airplane."

What I want to tell her is you ain't never in control, you only think you are. We've taxied up in front of the administration building by now and she's sitting there with her hair stringing in her face, all sweaty, and hoping I'll say something. Tell her something. Shit, what can I say? That being on top is not all she thinks it's going to be and that to make mistakes is human and that the only way out is straight down? Or that I'll feel better next week? Because what else is there to do?

"You did fine," I tell her.

Her face is shining. "I'll be back next week," she says. "You got me hooked on it, all right. I'm going to learn to fly!"

"That's good," I tell her. Because what else is there? We get out of the plane and walk to the administration building, legs shaky the way they always are on solid earth, and through the door into the office where another kid is waiting for a flying lesson, kinda scared and kinda excited.

"I'll be right with you," I tell him, "as soon as I log her hour."

## Map

J. B. GOODENOUGH

I am old vellum creased  
About no secret, a chart  
Of a land no crew sailed east  
Twelve days to get to. Falling apart,

Scratched in neither rum nor  
Blood, illegible, I am  
Nowhere seadogs searched for:  
No doubloons in this diagram,

And no single blasted pine  
Where you must turn, go  
Left or right, proceed nine  
Paces to where X marks no

Spot at all. So shut  
The secret of my hand  
On its lonely lines. I am what  
I am. No man's land.

# The “Equus” Aesthetic: The Doctor’s Dilemma

FRANK LAWRENCE

PETER SHAFFER’S *EQUUS* begins in darkness, in silence, with Doctor Dysart’s enlightened Apollonian mind confronting his darker counterpart, the Dionysian, in Alan Strang, the boy who blinded six horses. The doctor seeks a cure; he wishes to forget that his healing art requires learning to see in both directions—both good and evil, light and dark. Consequently, one may view both Dysart’s and Alan’s problems as reflections of one another. The central conflict of the play is set. Dysart’s name suggests some clues to his character and condition. In Greek, *Dy* is *two or double*; *dys* is *bad, hard, difficult, impaired, crippled, abnormal, morbid*. Both forms work for Dysart. And of course, there is the *art* in *Dys—art*.

Dysart probes his own psyche as the play proceeds, through moments of brightness to a final silence and blackout. The good doctor’s Apollonian sense—his need for balance, order, and harmony—tells him he needs “a way of seeing in the dark.” But he is frustrated by the voice out of the dark cave, the voice of the animal god, Equus. “He [Equus] opens his great square teeth, and says (*mocking*) ‘Why? . . . Why ME? . . . Why—ultimately—ME? Do you really imagine you can account for Me? . . . Poor Doctor Dysart!’ ” (p. 30, Bard Edition).

Indeed, he covets the unbridled Dionysian freedom he can partially see and understand in Alan—freedom to run or ride naked through the night, freedom to love what one can love, freedom to love what one cannot love, freedom to love recognized disorder. Dysart cannot quite see that his sleeping dreams are all blood and guts and that his waking dreams are of a purified, ordered Apollonian Greece. That antique split between the Apollonian and the Dionysian is the play’s burden—the doctor’s, the boy’s, and finally the audience’s. Darkness and Light are at war, and victory over this chaos is an illusion. The Platonic ideal of

reuniting the sundered halves remains an ideal. Chaos is the order of the play.

Shaffer makes us aware of this conflict through the theatrical experience as well as through dialogue. After the curtain rises, the audience and the stage are in darkness; the first stagedirection is *Darkness*. The match flame from Dysart's lighting a cigarette is the first gleam, a tiny one at that. The first stage direction in Act One is as important as the last one. Act One climaxes with a sensual recreation of Alan's naked ride on the horse, Nugget, a ride which in its throbbing rhythm, its finally galloping pace and intensity, becomes an orgasm ending in *Blackout*. Thus we experience that "seeing in the dark" is at once a large part of Dysart's healing art and his terrifying dilemma, even his Hobson's choice. He knows he can heal Alan at the expense of making a "ghost." Dysart is ultimately unable to unite himself with his lost other and so ends in the darkness of his own tormented psyche.

**A**T THE PLAY'S START, Dysart has come to a "point," he says. The audience awaits him as though it were *his* psychoanalyst. A part of the audience is sitting in tiers of seats which form part of the amphitheater behind him. In his notes on setting, Shaffer wishes the tiered rows behind to resemble (among other things) a "dissecting theater, formed into blocks and pierced by a central tunnel."

Dysart concludes this opening speech in Act One: "I'm sorry. I'm not making much sense. Let me start properly: *in order* [*italics mine*]. It began one Monday last month with Hester's visit." (page 22) At this moment, the light becomes warmer; Doctor Dysart wishes to see whether he can discern some order, some "proper" order—even if that order is only a proper sequence to explain chaos. Yet, he can do no more, and so as a fallible god, doctor, healer, victim, co-sufferer, patient, he will try to enter his own psyche to get to his chained-up heart, to look at his own desires. Dysart is not even sure what these desires may be, specifically, in this waking nightmare.

Dysart's redescent into the cave's darkness is agonizing: finding only darkness, he must recognize that life moves from darkness to darkness and that the interstitial light is often very dim and very brief indeed. Dysart's lament in the last moment of the play completes his long wail begun out of Act One's darkness. Dysart, as representative of the Apollonian, is limitedly successful: as a representative of mankind, he does his best by striking out in the darkness, sometimes with a metaphoric pick, still basically unarmed, uneyed, finally undone, and "with a sharp chain in [his] mouth." (page 125) He has seen the vision of the boy,



Alan, embracing the horse, Nugget. "Nonsensical," Dysart says, but "I keep thinking about the horse!" (page 22)

Dysart, in agony at the close, believes he is wanting in the guts, in the Dionysian, which he has alternately admired and abhorred in Alan Strang. Dysart desires both the Apollonian and the Dionysian, but the doctor's pathos is that the Apollonian wins darkly: "Passion, you see can be destroyed by a doctor. It cannot be created." (p. 124) Hester tries to convince Dysart that he will be curing the boy's pain and that this cure will have to solve the doctor's dilemma. Dysart counters with: "He [Alan] made it [pain]. . . . That boy has known a passion more ferocious than I have in any second of my life. And let me tell you something: I envy it" (p. 94).

Alan, the Dionysian self which Dysart envies, is a creator in the Nietzschean use of *Dionysian in The Birth of Tragedy*. Dysart, the impaired artist, envies Alan with a passion ironically so intense that he feels he must try to re-create, reorder his world. *Dys-art* representing that old split is here: between the purity of the Parthenon and the drunken, frenzied, mysterious Bacchae tearing up beasts and men alive, even their own god, Dionysus himself, in the hills beyond the ordered *polis*. Dysart desires the simplicity of the child's imagination and that control of the adult's mind—the delicate balance which has been not only mankind's dilemma but also the artist's own. There stands poor Doctor Dysart, where darkness wins in the land of the blind where no man is king.

The darkness motif, the cleavage between the Apollonian and the Dionysian, is reinforced by Alan's parents, Frank and Dora Strang. Each, with the rigidity their German name implies, tries to mold the son in the two very different visions of order into which they are chained. Frank, the old-line Marxist scoffing at his wife's ultra-religious zeal as so much "bad sex," replaces a gory representation of Christ's Passion with a calendar photograph of a white horse over Alan's bed. Dora, ironically, tells Alan of the Christian cavalry's first appearance in the New World: "The pagans thought horse and rider were one person . . . . Actually they thought it must a god . . . . It was only when one rider fell off, they realized the truth." (page 36) Dora does not recognize the awful, twisted truth of what she is doing to Alan in her attempt to rein him to her blind faith; so she helps him construct "The Field of Ha! Ha!" from her readings and Alan's learning by heart passages from The Book of Job. In this way, the Strangs helped their son become what he does not quite realize he has desired to be—a centaur, the Apollonian united with the Dionysian.

The Strangs present a splendid parallel to the conflict raging in Martin Dysart. However, his conflict runs deeper. What Dysart

seeks in his semi-blindness is a way of seeing where the Golden Mean may be. Dysart *can* see the terrible irony in Alan's revelation that he has discovered his father has his own secret worship: Frank goes to pornographic movies.

**M**ARTIN DYSART KNOWS not only that he is no seer but also that he sees too much of what he can see with a limited horse-blinder's vision. Early in *Equus* Dysart speaks of his recurring, "very explicit dream" in which he sees himself as a chief priest in Homeric Greece, where he is sacrificing "about five hundred boys and girls. I can see them stretching in a long queue right across the plain of Argos" (page 29). In his dream Dysart is wearing a pop-eyed mask which threatens to slip from his face and reveal to his two relentless assistants that he is revolted at what he is doing to these children and that he may become ill himself. He knows if these assistants see his real face, they will turn on him with his own knife. However, in this same dream, Dysart knows "It's this unique talent for carving that has got me where I am." (page 29) Thus, Dysart, standing in the limited light of his profession of healing artist, priest, victim, and seeing his limitations, sees his patient-victims and is ill.

As chief priest of the God Normal, Dysart knows that each person must have a "worship," even if it is on the dark side of the psyche. He can contrast the dark and light worships: "Sacrifices to Zeus took at the most sixty seconds each. Sacrifices to the Normal can take as long as sixty months." (page 20) Knowing he certainly cannot see entirely what he is doing, Dysart acknowledges, "I do ultimate things . . . essential things." Neither can Dysart see for himself, see the cave of his own psyche or an answer to one of his own ultimate, essential questions: "What worship have I got?" With a "worship" the good doctor might heal himself. If he might become naked as a child, naked as a boy-priest mounting his god, then Dysart might find a way of seeing in the dark. This note sounds from early in the play: "You see, I'm lost." (page 22) The "You see . . ." is in Dysart's opening speech to the audience. The clause is at once a statement of ironic fact, a challenge to the audience, and a moan when Dysart adds, "I'm lost" and later "*Extremity* is the point . . ." Further on (page 93), he bitterly recounts his antiseptic-sounding "Three weeks a year" in Greece "every bed booked in advance, every meal paid for by voucher, cautious jaunts in hired Fiats, suitcase crammed with Kao-Pectate! Such a fantastic surrender to the primitive." (page 95)

Dysart's world is sterile: unchangeable, pure, ordered, dead. In contrast, Alan's creation is that primitive one that Dysart would like to jump to had he the courage, but which his Apollonian

side will not accept. Alan, on the other hand, sees in the nipples of the naked Jill, his potential seductress, the eyes of his God Equus, but he turns his back on the reality to plunge his spike into the eyes of his God. The Dionysian implications abound. Hence, both characters turn their backs; to learn to see both ways is the art which eludes them both, and Dysart laments, "I sit looking at pages of centaurs trampling the soil of Argos—and outside my window he [Alan] is trying to become one in a Hampshire field" (page 95). The price each must pay is high; both Dysart and Alan are poor because each one's "art" is poor or *dys*: impaired, bad, crippled, and so on. The artist of living must look both ways, embrace both sides or remain a cave dweller. To embrace one side only, whether it be Apollonian or Dionysian, is psychic suicide; to see both sides yet deny one is also psychic suicide. Each character is a prisoner of self. One can no more embrace a horse solely than one can walk through life touching perfect reproductions of life.

**T**HE DARK INSANITY of the entire situation compounds itself with Dysart's recognition of the insanity of his divided self; nevertheless, he returns to the hospital—"this dreary place" (symbolic of his own psyche) to perform his final act of clinical voyeurism on Dionysian Alan, whom he envies. "Act it out if you like," he tells Alan. (page 118). Ironically, the replay of the nude seduction scene with Jill is an anti-climax compared to the structured climax of Act One.

However, what is revealing is Dysart's supreme act of voyeurism, which follows a middle ground between the Socratic question-and-answer and the analyst's clarifying questions, culminating with:

Dysart: More exactly.

Alan: I put it in her.

• • • •

Dysart: Give me the TRUTH! . . . Did you? Honestly?

Alan: Fuck off! (page 118)

In finding out what he both suspects and needs to know (that the boy did not have successful intercourse), Dysart has come, in the crescendoing of the climactic words, as close as he is able to embracing his denied Dionysian side. After Dysart's discovery, the two role-play, and Dysart takes the role of the God Equus completing the sequence with: "And you will fail! Forever and ever you will *fail*! You will see ME—and you will FAIL!" (page 121) Although supposedly therapeutic, Dysart's last speech most certainly comes from his own torment; question marks fall away,

and Dysart, not the god Equus, becomes the speaker. For one brief moment the role-switch occurs. However, role-playing is a safe game for Doctor Dysart in his healing art. He has broken Alan now and knows, "You [Alan] are going to be well." (page 123)

At the same time, Doctor Dysart also fears and knows "[his] achievement, however, is more likely to make a ghost!" Dysart has picked Alan's brain as surely as Alan spiked the eyes of six horses, as certainly as the chief priest of his dream carved the children in Homeric Greece. The doctor then explains he will cure the boy as methodically as in his dream of being chief priest. Martin Dysart, with bitterness, does see that he is destroying in a patient what he himself desires but cannot (or will not) make the jump to reach: passion, the Dionysian. Yes, the operation will be successful: Alan will become a ghost; Dysart will remain a fragmented, crippled, tortured man with a chain in his mouth. "And it never comes out." (page 125)

Dysart cannot "gallop." He is locked in his cave; his dim torch is guttering, but he (unlike Alan) will never forget. The poor doctor is cursed with a memory of a delight he could never have had. He sits finally staring, a prisoner of his psyche and his own healing art. Although the operation will be successful, both patient and doctor will die. The final stage directions read:

*A long pause.*  
*Dysart sits staring.*  
*Blackout.*

## Return

ROBERT JOE STOUT

The dream approaches through billowing trees  
Tearing at the years that separate my face  
From his. *No!* His gray momentum hisses  
From the meadow beneath the green leaves. Behind  
Them the mountain is stubbled with burned stumps  
And blackened rock, a mirror pitting the mist  
That hides it. The dream slides into a face  
I press against a pane of glass and I  
Race nakedly through bursts of childhood  
Shouting words his growth will never reach.

# Continuing Education

JOANNE ZIMMERMAN

THE AUTUMN THAT Thomas C. Johnson became President of the Corporation, his wife Karen undertook Continuing Education. She broached the subject to Tom in the car on the way home from the celebration banquet when he was satiated and pleasantly tipsy, his hand on her knee.

"School? What for? Don't you know enough already?" he laughed.

"Something to do." Whatever she pursued had to be genteel, non-controversial, and not for money.

"What's the matter with the Women's Board?"

"It's boring. But I wouldn't drop that, Tom. This sounds interesting, that's all."

"Well," he gave permission. "Just don't flunk."

"It isn't for credit. It's just for fun."

Her entire bridge club had signed up by the first day of class, following her lead, as she knew they would—Mimi, Barbara, Shirley, and other executive wives, each one in a tailored blouse like hers, scarf tied at the throat, tweed skirt and boots, their new notebooks open, ball-point pens at the ready. The room was fragrant with a heady mix of skin cream, body lotion, perfume, and the slightest overlay of gin.

The lecturer began by giving a general background for Greek literature—philosophy, art, history—and Karen fell in love, passionate to know this, to experience its permanence. She watched his slides in the darkened room, and visualized herself climbing the rocky slope to the Acropolis, leaning her cheek against a pillar of the Temple to Hera, passing through the Lion Gate, breathless in the pure clean air, exalted. Tom was nowhere to be seen in her dream, and she was not afraid to be alone, on her own.

After class the women walked to the University Bookstore, reading lists in hand. A young man with long dark hair that curled up softly as it touched his shoulders offered to wait on Karen. She had never stood close to anyone who looked like him, but he was the only salesperson not busy. She reassured herself by noticing that his

hair was very clean, although his fingernails were not, and relinquished the list to him. His name was Nick Elton, and he proved to be more than satisfactory.

Nick walked her through the store, his hand under her elbow, pulling books off the shelves, making suggestions about editions, unhurried, knowledgeable. His black mustache bushed out over his upper lip and curved down around the corners of his mouth. He had a characteristic gesture of smoothing the hairs away from the center, away from his lip, like the villain in an old-time melodrama. Karen thought they probably tickled.

Nick wrote the sales check. "Where do you want these sent?" "Nowhere. They're mine. I'm taking them."

"These are for you? All for you?" He stood close, spoke softly, so that she had to lean toward him to hear. She felt his warm breath on her cheek.

"Why, yes." Karen took a step back.

Nick followed. "I thought perhaps you had children in school—in college."

"No. *I'm* in school," she said proudly.

"Beautiful!" She decided it was probably necessary to stand so close in the crowded aisles of the noisy store—people were talking, music playing incessantly. After that she asked for Nick, waited if he was busy with another customer.

**A**TTENDANCE IN CONTINUING EDUCATION dwindled somewhat during the winter as husbands were transferred or women dropped out. But Karen's interest never flagged, and she carried along the others in her group. If challenged, she might have confessed to difficulty getting through Aristotle, but she made good use of him, keeping him on the bedside table for those nights when Tom went to sleep early. The man she had married twenty years ago was tall and thin, ruddy and sandy-haired. The gaunt stranger in the other bed was pale and had grey, thinning hair. She lifted "The Rhetoric" onto her breast—reliable soporific—and opened it anywhere.

During the second semester the class was required to meet at the opening of a new exhibit in a small gallery. The artist was young, black, stocky. His hair formed a black halo six inches from his head. He wore one gold earring, a tie-dyed shirt with short sleeves that bared muscular arms, a twist of elephant hair on his wrist, torn tan cotton pants. His paintings were huge rectangles of solid flat color titled with Roman numerals meticulously painted in the lower left-hand corner. Karen knew she should say something about Art when they were introduced, but the words she learned in Continuing Education did not seem to apply. "Interesting," she

finally said.

After divesting herself on her appraisal and meeting his moist gaze, Karen excused herself, sat down, and crossed her legs. The artist spent the evening strolling around the gallery, sipping from the glass in his hand, and staring at the women from Continuing Education, until finally there was a row of women sitting with tightly crossed legs on the bentwood chairs along the wall and the artist had passed out in the back room.

The second year of Continuing Education began with Poetry. Karen hurried to the Bookstore after the first lecture and looked for Nick Elton, but could not see him: the store was crowded. Sales people—many of whom were students themselves—wore green cotton jackets to distinguish themselves from their customers. They have also achieved sameness, Karen thought. Too bad. She greeted Mimi in one aisle, chatted a few moments. She thought Mimi look especially well, cheerful.

Karen wished for Nick. She selected the required critical essays—some she had read in college, and was reassured to find them still pertinent. And Donne, Hopkins, Cummings. She browsed over a sale table of bargain books, picked up a thin volume of Gibran and studied the portrait on the cover—lean oval face, bearded, with brilliant dark eyes under clearly shaped brows. A voice said, so close to her ear that she could feel breath on her cheek, “That’s not for you.”

She looked from the drawing on the cover into a face of shocking similarity and dropped the book. The young man continued, “Not with your intellect” and smiled; Karen recognized Nick.

She wanted to hug him; she took his hand in both her own. “Oh, I’m so glad to see you. I hardly recognized you!”

“Grew a beard this summer. What did you do?”

“Me? Nothing. Played golf. Played bridge.” She was still unnerved. “We went to England in the spring.”

“Beautiful! How was it?”

Beautiful.” Nick seemed glad to see her, too; he put his hand under her elbow, guided her to the poetry shelf.

ON A WET, COLD later afternoon in October, Karen answered a ring at the door. Nick stood there, hatless, his collar turned up, hair and shoulders darkened with rain. “I was on my way home and I saw this had come in for you. The Eliot you ordered. So I decided to drop it off.”

“Thank you, thank you. Won’t you come in? It’s miserable out today, isn’t it?” She saw him for the first time as a man who had an existence away from the store, someone who lived somewhere, moved through the city streets, and it made her feel adventure-

some "It's very good of you." She took his coat. He wiped his wet forehead with a dirty handkerchief. "Would you like some coffee? Or a drink?"

Nick sat primly on a Jacobean chair in the living room. "Nice place."

"Thank you."

"How is it going with Continuing Ed?"

"Quite well. I'm not working quite as hard this semester, but I love it." She smiled, indicated the package he had brought. "I don't understand it all, but that really doesn't matter, does it?"

"No?"

"No. Because with poetry I think you don't really have to understand. You can just sort of *feel* it. Get a feeling, an impression, without putting your mind to it at all."

Nick put his head back and laughed, which irritated Karen, but she did not want him to leave. "Poetry is tough," he said. "Hard work, the hardest kind of work. To write, and to read. *I* write poetry." Karen looked interested. "Look, I'll show you." He ripped open the paper wrapper, paged through the slim black book he had brought, stood, read aloud, "Think now/She gives when our attention is distracted/ And what she gives, gives with such supple confusions/ That the giving famishes the craving." "Karen wondered about whom he was speaking. Nick continued, waving his free hand, " 'Gives too late/ What's not believed in, or if still believed,/ In memory only, reconsidered passion.' "

Karen heard "passion." She could not follow the sense of what he was reading, but thought he looked marvelous standing before her, young, bearded, poetic himself, taking the lovely words so seriously, Continuing Education incarnate. She watched the expression of his eyes, the way his lips formed words, gave them substance. She could never do this in the store. "Yes, yes, I see. That's wonderful. Beautiful."

Tom came home just as Nick was leaving and Karen introduced them, said to Nick, "I had no idea how late . . . I hope I haven't kept you from anything."

"I enjoyed it. I wouldn't have stayed if I didn't want to." To Tom he said with perfect composure, "Glad to meet you, sir."

As the door closed Tom said, "Who's the hippie?" As he went to pour himself a drink, he noticed the bar open, the two glasses, and added, "Does he come here often?"

"Never has before. I had ordered some books and they came in just as he was leaving the store, so he dropped them off."

"Since when do you give delivery men a drink?"

"Well, he's not exactly a delivery man, Tom. I told you. He sells books. He writes poetry himself. And it's so miserable out . . . I



appreciated it."

"Does he do this for everyone? For all their customers?" He walked toward her, glass in hand, stood over her chair.

"I have no idea. I thought it was nice of him to . . . What are you getting at, Tom?"

"I don't like it. I don't want him coming here again. Is that understood? Don't let him in the house if he comes here again."

Karen went in the kitchen to tell cook she could serve dinner. Then she excused herself to Tom, saying that she wanted to wash her hands after handling the books. She wanted to calm the trembling she felt in the pit of her stomach. She could not cross Tom, but she didn't want to relinquish Nick. She looked long at herself in the mirror—a pudgy childless middle-aged woman with dyed black hair, cheeks flushed, dark circles under her eyes—dried her hands, patted her hair into place, arranged her lips in a smile and went to dinner.

The next time Nick dropped in, Karen kept him in the doorway. "I think I should tell you that my husband was upset that you were here."

Nick nodded. "I knew that."

"You did! How did you know?" She stepped aside to let him in.

"Vibes. Felt the vibrations." He gave her a searching look. "Why?"

"He doesn't know you, after all. And he's terribly afraid of strangers. He worries about being robbed. We were robbed once when lived in Larchmont. Or was it Shaker Heights? Anyhow . . ."

"And what do *you* think?"

"It is an upsetting experience."

"What?"

"Being robbed. Larchmont, I think it was. It turned out to be the maid's boyfriend."

"No. I mean about my coming here."

Karen answered slowly, seriously. "It's true that I don't know anything about you really. Still I *feel* as though I know you. As though I have known you for a long time. I consider that we are friends. You know my mind. Sometimes I think Tom's problem is that *he* doesn't know me. But then, I hardly know myself. For the first half of my life I was my parents' daughter, and for the rest I have been Tom's wife."

Nick watched her closely during this speech, then gave her a wide grin of complicity. "You know perfectly well who you are."

"I do?" She waited breathlessly to hear the riddle solved. She did not doubt that he might have the answer.

"Why of course! And it is pure gold!"

Karen smiled in gratitude, but then she thought that perhaps

that was a reference to money, and in that case Nick was not so different after all. She poured them both a drink. "Tell me about yourself."

"Not much to tell."

"Are you studying?"

"You might say so."

"And your family?"

"My family?"

"Yes."

"What would you like to know?"

"Do they live here? Do you have brothers and sisters? What does your father do?" She wanted to have his credentials in hand.

Nick said, "What my family is or is not has nothing to do with me. I am what you see. I create myself daily. I am responsible to no one."

When Nick was ready to leave, Karen held his coat for him. He put his arms in the sleeves, turned, arms still outstretched, and put them around her. He waited through a long moment to sense her response. When she did not stiffen or turn away, he bent, kissed her on the mouth, and left.

She closed the door softly, turned and leaned against it. She felt a little giddy. She was startled by how brusquely he had kissed her, his lips hard against hers, the scratchy hairs of his mustache. She didn't know if that pleased her. The smell of him remained in her nostrils—a musky sweet smell she had noticed in the Bookstore, but thought came from the scented candles that were for sale. She had thought of him in terms of Continuing Education—rather remote, arty, historical—art history, perhaps. But now her lips stung.

Well, she thought, *that* would certainly be different. But not all that different. Everyone knew that Shirley was sleeping with the yard man when Barney was on the road. It hardly seemed momentous. Shirley—with her precise definition, her carefully styled hair, corseted body—continued to be at the Club for bridge on Wednesdays, never missed a lecture in Continuing Education. Other women had affairs.

Nick stopped in regularly with books Karen ordered, and added suggestions of his own, to show her his own preference in poetry, to expand the limitations of the course, he said. Even when Karen made her purchase in the store, if the weather was bad or she had errands to do, she left the books with Nick to deliver. She anticipated his kiss.

**C**ONTINUING EDUCATION RECESSED for the week of Thanksgiving. Karen used the time to read the poetry Nick had suggested—poorly printed sparse collections in coarse paper

covers. She read and re-read, worked hard at comprehension. She could hardly believe that she understood the poems correctly, but she knew she would never ask the instructor to amplify on the imagery of desire, explicit descriptions of physical sex, and shocking vocabulary, words the dictionary was ashamed to print.

When the doorbell rang, she wished it would not be Nick. "It's early, isn't it?" Karen said.

Nick seemed more ebullient than usual. "I took the afternoon off. Just getting into that Christmas shit." He had no excuse of books to deliver. "I wanted to see you. The real you!" and sat down.

Karen poured them each a drink and also sat down. She could think of nothing to say, looked around the room for inspiration. He followed her glance toward the book that lay open on the coffee table. "You're reading them." Karen nodded. "Good! How do you like them?"

"Well, ah . . . They are certainly different. A departure."

"From what?"

"From the poetry in the course. As you said they would be. From anything I've ever read before."

"So you *don't* like them?" He reclined against the back of the couch, stretched his legs, closed his eyes briefly.

"Well, I wouldn't say that."

"What *would* you say?"

"One or two things I'd like to ask you about."

"That's why I'm here!" He sat forward. "Shall I read aloud?"

"Oh, no!" she said quickly. "I read them. Some of them I rather like. But I could hardly believe that . . . They can't be only about . . ."

"Sex."

"Sex. Yes. Well, sex, but all so . . . explicit. It hardly seems like poetry!"

"Are there subjects suitable for poetry and others not?"

Karen felt she ought to have an opinion since this was her third semester. She ventured in an objective classroom manner, "I'm not sure in my own mind what the province of poetry should be, but I don't think these poems deal with it."

"Bravo!" Nick chided. "You don't know what it is, but you don't think . . ." He stopped in mid-sentence, abruptly stood. "Did they *grab* you?"

"Grab me!"

"Yes! That's the criterion. Immediate experience! Poetry is compressed. compressed emotion. Explodes in your head, in your gut. What is more dynamite than sex?"

Karen stalled for time. "Shouldn't it be recollected in tranquility?"

"You've got to have something to recollect."

"And beautiful? Beautiful to read?"

"Or should it be true?" He stood with his feet almost touching hers, leaning over her.

"Truth is beauty, beauty truth." She had to hold her head arched back to look up at him. Her mind made up, she said softly, "I liked the poems. I liked them very much. I loved them."

"Truth! Beauty!" Nick stepped back, pulled her to her feet. "that's it!" he shouted. "that's it exactly! The truth!"

"Yes!" Karen agreed. "Yes!" breathing the sweetish, musky smell, her lips ready for his kiss.

"And the truth shall set you free!" His arms tightly around her, he sucked her mouth in his.

"What . . . what does that mean?" she whispered when she could speak.

"That means, let's fuck!"

"Oh, my God!" Karen said, not resisting the fingers that unbuttoned, untied, unzipped.

ONE LATE AFTERNOON IN JANUARY Nick rolled away from Karen, found a cigarette on the bedside table, lit it and lay back, one hand under his head. Karen admired him during a few moments of silence, then she said sadly, "I won't be buying so many books any more."

"Really?" He grinned. "Found another hobby?"

"Oh, Nick." She edged toward him, put her hand on his shoulder. He put his arm around her. "No. But the next semester is Music, so I don't suppose I'll be buying so many books. A few, of course. And records." She continued hopefully, "I don't suppose you can take care of me in that department, can you?"

"I'll take care of you in any department you name." He laughed and kissed her. "But I can't sell records. That's upstairs."

"I thought so."

"You'll love it. Music. It's a language like poetry—universal language." He took a deep drag, released it slowly, watching the smoke, and said, "It's my joy."

"What is?"

"Music. I'm a composer."

"Really. I didn't know that. I thought you were a poet. Didn't you say you wrote poetry?" Karen propped herself up on her elbow to look in his eyes and see if he was teasing. "You never told me this before."

"Never came up in the conversation."

She rested her head on his shoulder again. "Well, that is certainly interesting. What sort of thing do you compose?"

"Mm. Chamber works. For small groups."

"How lovely. What are they like?"

"Hard to describe. Impossible really. Perhaps you'll hear some of it one day."

"Oh, I hope so. I certainly hope so. I'd just love to. Couldn't I hear some of it now?"

"I could hum a few bars." He laughed.

"I don't mean right *now*, silly!"

"I'm not composing much these days. No time. No money. By the time I work in that damn store. And do a couple of other things . . ." He gave her a little squeeze. "I don't have the time."

"Then what makes you a composer?" Karen was pleased that this question had occurred to her.

"Good question. The things I've written. The intention of writing more. Christ, I don't even have a piano now." Nick put out the cigarette, turned toward Karen. "And that's the truth."

Karen put her arms around him, her thigh over his. "Truth" had become their shibboleth, their synonym for desire, for the first time they had sex. In the Bookstore, when Nick said, "I'm speaking of the truth," Karen knew she could expect him that afternoon. She was delighted with the shared secret, the playful intrigue. She would rush home to take a bath.

Now Karen said, "You'll be famous some day."

Nick laughed. "Notorious, anyhow."

At dinner Karen said to Tom, "You never know what to give me for my birthday."

"Your birthday! I gave you stock last year."

"That was for taxes."

"I used to give you diamonds, but you put them in the vault and never wear them."

"It's such a nuisance to get them out. I always forget to arrange it. But they're beautiful. Really, I love them."

"The hell. When we moved to Sausalito you forgot them in the bank in Shaker Heights. Your trouble is, you've got too much of everything."

"There *is* something I would like, Tom, if you'd like a tiny hint."

"I'll give you a check, and you get whatever you like." What is it?"

"A piano."

"A piano! But you don't play."

"I used to. I'd like to take it up again. Next semester is Music, and it would be handy."

Tom ordered a Steinway. In the Bookstore Karen asked Nick, "Do you give lessons?"

"In what?"

"I have a piano. I thought I might study."

Nick came to see it, played arpeggios. "You just mentioned that you wanted one, and got one, is that it? Beautiful!"

Karen watched his hands—bony, thin, hammer-like fingers striking the keys. She undid the top button of her blouse, wanting those fingers to continue to undress her, but she did not interrupt him, and felt virtuous that she could suppress desire for the sake of Art. She wondered how much money Nick needed to live on.

**I**T TURNED OUT that there were a number of books necessary to the semester on Music—criticism, biography, history. On a raw March afternoon, Karen hurried to the Bookstore, head down, hardly feeling the wind and rain. Tom was out of town for a few days. There were several books she needed and—given the bad weather—she was confident that Nick would deliver them. It would not be impossible for him to say with her until Tom's return.

Looking eagerly for Nick, she saw him across the room, head down, talking to someone who was shorter than the shelves of books. Karen prepared to be polite and self-effacing, to wait her turn. She pretended to browse, and moved slowly closer. When she came into the same aisle as Nick, she saw that the customer was Mimi. Nick was focussing all his attention on her, standing close, talking softly, while she gazed up at him—her blue eyes slightly crossed because of his proximity—with an unabashed adoring smile.

Karen froze, could not move away. What's the enrollment of Continuing Education? she thought bitterly. Can he be that helpful and sweet to every single one? Certainly must sell a hell of a lot of books! She started at Mimi with loathing, wondered what poetry she had been helped to discover, and if it had been delivered each time. Another salesperson approached Karen, but she rejected him. She was on the point of running out of the store when Nick suddenly turned as though he had felt the heat of her stare all along, and winked at her.

When Tom returned Karen felt nervously that he was surveying, appraising her. "Why are you looking at me that way?"

"You seem gloomy. Everything all right?"

She wondered if somehow he had learned about Nick. "Everything is fine. Just fine."

"What did you do while I was gone? Anything special?"

"Nothing. Nothing at all really. Studied. Kept myself busy, that's all."

Finally he said, "I've got some rather bad news for you."

"Yes?" Karen clasped her hands to quiet them, brought them to her trembling lips.

"Russ is being transferred to head the Atlanta office."

Karen raised her eyebrows. "Is that all?"

"Is that *all*!" Tom laughed. "Is that all *you* have to say? Christ, what a joke! I've been holding this off because I thought you would be upset."

"Why should I be upset? It's a promotion, isn't it? A nice one." She sat back in her chair.

"Because of Mimi. I thought Mimi was your friend, and that you'd miss her."

"She *is* my friend, and I *will* miss her, I suppose. But it's a good thing for Russ, for them both. I'm used to transfers. I've lived with them all my life."

In April the women in Continuing Education were required to attend a concert of contemporary music. Mimi and Karen drove there together. When they were seated, they both saw Nick half way across the room. "Of course," Karen said. "He's a composer himself."

"Really? A painter, I thought. He told *me* he was a painter!" She and Karen looked at each other in recognition of their mutual interest. Mimi giggled; "Anyhow, he makes beautiful music. I'm going to miss that young man."

After the concert, on their way out of the hall, Nick hailed them. He was with a group of seven or eight young men and women, introduced Karen and Mimi as "two of my nice old ladies" with an arm about each of them. Karen noticed in his friends the sweet, musky smell she associated with Nick, mixed with the odor of stale sweat. They jingled, flounced, hovered; they dressed in gauzy clothes, flowing sleeves, beads, bangles, striking fabrics, wore broad-brimmed hats, and carried knapsacks, book bags and leather pouches. They laughed a great deal, calling to each other and to friends who passed them. Karen had a disquieting sense of incongruity.

"How did you like the music?" Nick asked, and had to repeat the question before she heard him and answered.

"Interesting. Is it anything like yours?" challenging him to be truthful for once—composer? poet? painter?

Nick looked from Karen to Mimi and smiled without answering. The question had no consequence.

When his group swept on, Karen had the feeling that they had *held* her, although she knew this was not so, caught her momentarily in a web—gauzy, brilliant, fascinating—to which she could never abandon herself.

Mimi stood still on the sidewalk, one arm in her coat-sleeve, the coat hanging off the other shoulder, and rummaged in her purse.

"What are you looking for?"

"I just want to see if everything is here. I feel a little bit as if I've been had." Her gloves fell to the sidewalk. She bent, straightened,

snapped the purse closed, shrugged into her coat, fastened it, patted her hair into place, looked around with a distracted air.

Karen burst out laughing. "So . . . so do I!" and put her arms around Mimi in a hug. "What happened just now?"

**A**T BREAKFAST the next morning Karen said to Tom, "I'd like to entertain for Mimi and Russ. A farewell party." When he did not answer, she took this for assent, or at least interest, and continued magnanimously, "I'd like to do something a little different."

"Like what?"

"A musical evening."

"Musical evening? You mean with a band, and people dancing?"

"No. Don't be silly. Sort of like a little concert."

"Hire a hall? Sell tickets?"

His jokes were annoying her, but she was glad he was in good humor. "Right here. You gave me the piano. Nobody has even seen my beautiful new piano."

"I haven't *heard* it much either. Who's going to perform on it? You?"

"I know someone. That is, *we* both know him, Mimi and I. He's a friend of both of us. The young man who works at the Bookstore. He's a composer really. Just selling books for now, to make a living for the time being."

"The special delivery."

"Yes."

"Damn good salesman. I don't know how lucrative composing is, but he'd be a fool to give up selling." He coughed a dry little laugh. "I'd hire him myself if I could use what he has."

"Well, Tom?"

"What?"

"May I?"

"I suppose so. I didn't know Mimi and Russ were so interested in music."

"Mimi is. Mimi and I, and the other women. Because of Continuing Education, you know. But it will be a nice party, Tom. Mimi will love it."

The party was held on a lovely May evening. Nick wore a dark blue suit, a shirt in a delicate pink light material with a ruffled front. Collar or tie was difficult to discern under his hair and beard. Karen introduced him proudly. Some of the men stiffened at the sight of his long hair, but all the women knew him, greeted him with wit and smiles.

Tom shook hands. "Glad to see you," he said without much enthusiasm. Karen thought, he doesn't care enough to be jealous. As



long as I don't make a fool of him.

Shirley alone seemed hostile. She said, "So *this* is the surprise package."

In retaliation Karen said pointedly to Barney, "Glad you're in town this weekend. We don't get to see much of you." She had heard that Barney came home early, unannounced, fired the yard man, and the garden was rank.

After cocktails Karen summoned the guests into the living room where chairs were set in rows facing the piano. She overheard someone say, "Well, this is something different," and began to see the evening as a success. She introduced Nick, sat down in the front row, hands folded in her lap. Someone in back of her yawned, then coughed quickly to disguise the sound.

Nick sat at the piano, adjusted his shirt cuffs, and looked down at the keyboard, his hair falling softly against his cheeks, obscuring his expression. Then he shook it back and stood. He said, "The music you are about to hear is a combination of serial and aleatoric, that is to say, chance. Accident. Silence is as much a part of the music as sound."

Karen had not expected him to lecture. She laughed, said apologetically, "Of *course* we will be quiet."

"Of course," he repeated solemnly. "But when *I* am quiet, you must not be uneasy."

"Uneasy!"

Nick sat again, put his head back, and began to play. There was confusion of sound at first, and Karen waited for definition, for form to emerge, such as she had been taught in Continuing Education. She felt suddenly sad—the course was ending, and Mimi was leaving. Mimi really *was* her friend, as good a friend as she had ever had, considering how frequently they had been moved about, and Tom's eminence in the company. She and Mimi would see each other from time to time, and keep the friendship alive. They had so much in common. She looked sidelong, prepared to give Mimi a smile, but did not catch her eye. Nick was thundering chords in half-steps in the bass, his hair flying out around his head. He looked like a composer should look, or a poet. She wondered if she would feel differently toward him now that the semester was over.

He twiddled a few notes in the treble, answered from midrange after a pause that endured through minutes. This must be the silence he warned us about, she thought. She heard someone moving restlessly on a chair in back of her. Each time she thought a melody was emerging, Nick disappointed her again.

He leaned back, let his hands fall to his sides. Karen wondered if the piece might have come to an end, but he did not signal that, did not look toward the audience, kept his head down, his hands limply

at his sides. Someone clapped once, then fell into embarrassed silence.

Suddenly Nick attacked the keyboard again. The opening notes were a simple melody, like a child's folk song, repeated with slight variations. Karen thought, Ah, a fugue, and was pleased to recognize it, but it did not continue. Nick returned to the twiddlings and thumpings that had characterized the beginning, and Karen's anxiety mounted. What if he was not talented in the least? Made a fool of her? But no one would laugh at her. They wouldn't even dare giggle in private because Tom was their boss, and in the competition for promotion there was always someone glad to carry tales for his own preferment and someone else's downfall.

She glanced over at Tom who sat back comfortably, arms crossed, eyes closed, a bemused smile on his pale face, as though to say, "Well, there's an end to *him*." He might have been asleep.

Nick was playing her new piano with his index finger and his elbow, like a naughty child. Even so, the tone was wonderful. If she laughed at him now, everyone would follow her lead. On the other hand, perhaps she would take lessons from Nick, or from someone else. She would think about it. She would make up her own mind.

But for now she would let things go as they were going. Tom was not angry. All the women had been buying books; perhaps one of the others would sponsor Nick's next concert. She could smell a delicious supper in preparation. The party would be a success. She would decide later what to do about Nick.

## Sampler

NANCY G. WESTERFIELD

At seven, the mastery  
Of its stitches had loomed  
As lifework; and so it proved.  
At seventy, life has embroidered  
Her face rich with smock-stitch  
And cross-, and age's pierce  
Of wounds webs a sampler  
Of knots, chains, and loops,  
Where love's needle artfully  
Followed through with time's floss.

# Shirts

ROY BENTLEY

The shirt I slept in is wrinkled now. It lies beside my bed, quiet—a squirrel I buried one Christmas. Both sleeves, still rolled, cross like pages of the paper we used as shroud. The shirt is brown. I have seven the same: I am reminding myself that each day

is a dream I wear, walk in  
till something strips me. It is hard to dream.

Six shirts hang in the closet. The one she bought that Christmas lost; one among many I may have worn it today. I cannot know. Six sets of arms stand as one in shadow, edges smoothed in. I count them. Tomorrow and tomorrow are as these—the seventh spreading itself: an animal almost still.

There is a darkness here, one I am familiar with. Yet it comes inside as if it were the first time: slowly, watching the eyes. I entered a woman once like this—at Christmas, her parents shopping. Hearing them in the garage we hurried upstairs; saw her father with the small body—the squirrel—holding it,

stroking cold. It was a gift from a previous summer. I recall how she stood naming it, cradling newspaper until I took it away, the cheap gray staying.

I am reminded by all things of that which is left;  
by fragments and by feel I piece it back.  
It is this hard to dream. After sleep I rise,  
dress in brown, sleeves surrounding me.  
It is a good fit.

*In his fine study of the subject, Democracy and the Novel: Popular Resistance to Classic American Writers (1978), Henry Nash Smith examines the historical record. Under the guise of literary criticism, says Smith, popular literary critics were dealing in pop philosophy—they criticized the likes of Emerson, Hawthorne, and James for presenting a view of the world opposed to the conventional view that truth is absolutely attainable in the "material universe knowable through the senses," that values are fixed, and that it is the duty of writers to convey those values. This is a critical view profoundly opposed to psychological fiction (which maintains that truth lies within human beings and that it is therefore relative); it suspects nuance and nonconformity. It reflects that specious American sort of optimism, with its suspicion of the "depressing."*

*One hears that last-mentioned term in the classroom frequently (not to mention the cocktail party.) It is an up-hill battle (too often an up-a-sheer-cliff battle) to try to convince students that someone like James is exhilarating (not "depressing") because he does examine complexity of the sort Smith talks about, and I confess that I sometimes avoid James and Hawthorne out of sheer exhaustion at the prospect of having to make the effort. One can forgive students—we all wanted certainty at that age; the really frightening part is that their tastes are precisely those of the general reading public: it's the adults who have not grown up.*

*For "moral," then, read the desire on the part of general readers for simplistic moral lessons which will not rock their epistemological boat. (The dangers of such an attitude in an age of great social change and transition for Americans are obvious). A glance at your drug-store book rack or the best-seller list will confirm: simpleminded romances and one-dimensional romans à clef prevail.*

*My mail is full of stories "moral" in this sense. Here are a few of the topics (with accompanying messages) I encounter all the time: the treatment of children (we shouldn't be mean to them); the pains of growing up (they're difficult and should be dealt with sympathetically); the difficulties of mental illness (we should be nice to such people); the agonies of old age, especially when endured in a nursing home (we mustn't ignore old folk; they're people too). The nursing home is, if my experience holds true, the most over-used setting in fiction to begin with; and when a story ends with the heart of a nursing-home volunteer "bursting with compassion" for an inmate, and that is the theme of the story, I feel as if I've been had. It's certainly not that I don't subscribe to these truths; it's that I don't think that literature consists of schematically imposing ideas on experience.*

*Although he undoubtedly has something more serious in mind (though I'm not sure what or how much more serious), John Gardner seems to me to be giving his authority to such simplistic thinking*

about literature. *On Moral Fiction* is a very assertive, repetitious, unsubstantiated, and vague little treatise written by a man of obvious good will who is constantly trying to push the limits of the writer beyond where they will go. In a way, one can see why: he despises the pure stylists and the empty purveyors of the stereotypical "images" of our times—the Updikes, the Barthelmes, the Vonneguts. Like most of us he wants to find a middle way between them and "didactic art." He believes (like Hawthorne and James) that "the universe is partly structured, partly unstructured" and that art therefore is a process of testing hypotheses about what patterns human behavior follows, not of imposing preformulated theses on reality.

But Gardner wants it both ways: "for the most part our artists do not struggle—as artists have traditionally struggled—toward a vision of how things ought to be." They do not present us with "valid models for imitation"; they are not engaged in a "search for and analysis of values"; they risk creating a generation that scorns or is ignorant of the idea of values.

A great deal of this sort of language suggests to me precisely "didactic art," as does Gardner's vague and indiscriminate use of terms like "evil." And at times he seems to be aware of his own errors. After a particularly rousing passage about how "whenever possible moral art holds up models of decent behavior," especially of the struggle against the aforementioned "evil," he adds: "Sometimes, admittedly, the essentially moral artist may ignore this end, limiting his art to a search for information." I contend that this last is the function of art—to heighten our consciousnesses, to seek out those often ambiguous areas of human behavior that constitute the structured and the unstructured parts of our "universe," and to present those areas to us for our information. If we wish to make this information a part of our moral codes, so be it. The artist does engage in the "analysis" of values, and he may help in our search for them, but he's not a moralist. If he encourages us in any "model," let it be that sort of open-mindedness.

A lot of the writers Gardner (and I) dislikes do not fulfill this more modest (and yet ultimately greater and more beneficial), non-Gardnerian criterion; they seldom take us beyond their own limited, stereotypical minds, and they disguise their limitations with flashy style. But Gardner is not even content to stay in the vaguely substantiated position to which we have followed him thus far. His ideal appears to be that old fraud, Tolstoy, whose forte is passing up the dramatization of interesting, concrete human situations in the interests of moral legislation and didacticism. Reading *War and Peace* (and to a lesser degree *Anna Karenina*) is such a frustrating experience because the author cannot resist cramming his moralism down our throats when even he doesn't have a very clear idea of what

he means. (The last 50 pages of *War and Peace* are the classic example of this behavior.) Let us not forget either that Tolstoy is the chief forerunner of the vaguely solipsistic what-the-world-needs-now is-love-sweet-love philosophy which had a (happily) brief run recently, notably among some of Gardner's unfavorable writers. In his insulting next-to-last chapter, Gardner cops out in true Tolstoyan fashion: "Only the true artist can know for sure, by the text of his own emotions, whether some new, surprising venture that declares itself art is in fact art." Listen to *Big Brother*, kids—he may not be able to express himself, but he knows what he means, and you better believe it. In the end, then, Gardner abjures communication itself—whence moral examples under these circumstances?

In historical terms we have probably made some progress in establishing the degree to which fiction relates to morality. Certainly it is difficult to imagine that we have not had all the possibilities laid out for us. In art we have had Joycean objectivity (whose fallacies were so tellingly revealed by Wayne C. Booth), existentialism, and solipsistic stylism; in literary criticism the extremes of the New Criticism and the game-playing of Structuralism (a position rightly denounced in Walter Creed's article in our last issue). On the other hand moralizing is still much among us, with critical support from the likes of Gardner and George Steiner—who recently went on record as saying that in the case of some topics artistry becomes irrelevant. (In a well-ordered world he would be guillotined for such a statement). There are even some signs that the public is becoming less insistent on moralism—the phenomenal success of that uneven but certainly not moralistic novel, *Garp*, for instance. I reject the notion that fiction can be moral in the popular sense, that is, that it can offer legalistic solutions to our problems. For me, the real morality of art is as a commitment to ways of investigating the world.

JCK



# Contributors

**R**OY BENTLEY is a graduate student in English at Ohio University. MARY CLEARMAN, whose name will be well known to our readers, teaches at Northern Montana College. She's currently looking into Montana history and writing a novel, *The Jackalope*. J.B. GOODENOUGH studied with Mark Van Doren and Robert Lowell at Harvard. She has begun publishing again "after a long silence (and two daughters)." FRANK LAWRENCE is an alumnus, and former colleague and contributor: we're happy to be associated with him once more. He teaches English at Dana Hall in Wellesley, Massachusetts, and part-time at Harvard's Adult Program, and writes in the summer. Having published several stories here in the '60s, ROBERT JOE STOUT has since brought out a novel, *Miss Sally* (Bobbs Merrill) and a volume of poems, *Swallowing Dust* (Red Hill Press). NANCY G. WESTERFIELD is at Kearney State College in Nebraska. Two of her poems appeared in our Winter, 1978 issue, and she's published extensively elsewhere as well. JOANNE ZIMMERMAN lives in Homewood, Illinois. She has a long and impressive list of publications in such journals as *Antioch Review*, *Kansas Quarterly*, and *Western Humanities Review*. Her story "Smitty's Haven" won a place in *Best Little Magazine Fiction*, 1970.

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